

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) A hydrogel having a floatability ~~where~~ wherein from 40% to 90% of a solution ~~and/or~~ or suspension to be thickened is thickened starting from the surface of the liquid and the rest of the solution ~~and/or~~ or suspension to be thickened is thickened starting from the bottom of ~~the~~ a container for the solution or suspension.

2. (Currently amended) A The hydrogel ~~according to~~ of claim 1 ~~where the~~ wherein a solidification time is less than 120 seconds and/or ~~the~~ a blood absorbenee absorbance is at least 10 g/g.

3. (Currently amended) A process-for preparing a hydrogel, ~~which comprises~~ comprising after-treating a dried hydrogel with a hydrophobic compound, and ~~if appropriate~~ optionally a hydrophilic compound.

4. (Currently amended) A The hydrogel ~~according to~~ of claim 3, ~~wherein~~ the hydrophobic compound and ~~if appropriate~~ optional hydrophilic ~~compounds~~ compound are particles having an average diameter from 0.001 to 10 μ m.

5. (Currently amended) A The hydrogel ~~according to~~ of claim 3 ~~or 4~~, wherein the hydrophobic ~~compounds are~~ compound is a hydrophobicized ~~silicas~~ silica or a hydrophobicized ~~mixtures~~ mixture of silicas and aluminas.

6. (Currently amended) A The hydrogel ~~according to any one of claims claim 3 to 5,~~ wherein the hydrophilic ~~compounds are silicas~~ compound is a silica or a mixtures mixture of silicas and aluminas.

7. (Currently amended) A The hydrogel ~~according to any one of claims claim 3 to 6,~~ wherein the hydrogel is additionally aftertreated with a multivalent cation and ~~if appropriate a~~ an optional surfactant.

8. (Currently amended) A The process ~~according to~~ of claim 7, wherein the multivalent cation is an aluminum ion.

9. (Currently amended) A The process ~~according to~~ of claim 7 ~~or 8,~~ wherein the surfactant is a sorbitan ester.

10. (Currently amended) A The process ~~according to any one of claims claim 7 to 9,~~ wherein the multivalent cation is metered as an aqueous solution and the surfactant has an HLB value of less than 18.

11. (Currently amended) A The process ~~according to any one of claims claim 3 to 10,~~ wherein the aftertreated hydrogel is dried.

12. (Cancelled)

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently amended) ~~Hygiene articles~~ A hygiene article comprising a hydrogel ~~according to either of claims~~ claim 1 and 2.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (New) A method of absorbing blood, body fluids, or both comprising contacting the blood, body fluid, or both with a hydrogel of claim 1.

18. (New) The method of claim 17 wherein the hydrogel is present in a hygiene article.

19. (New) A method of thickening an aqueous solution or suspension comprising contacting the solution or suspension with a hydrogel of claim 1.

20. (New) A method of thickening medical wastes comprising contacting the medical waste with a hydrogel of claim 1.

21. (New) A composition comprising a hydrogel of claim 1 and one or more of a biocidal material, an antimicrobial material, an antibacterial material, a perfume or scent material, a stabilizer, a dye, and a pH indicator.

22. (New) The process of claim 4 wherein the hydrophobic compound is a hydrophobicized silica or a hydrophobicized mixture of silicas and aluminas.

23. (New) The process of claim 4 wherein the hydrophilic compound is a silica or a mixture of silicas and aluminas.